

Mapungubwe National Park - Accessibility for visitors with mobility challenges

Mapungubwe is one of South Africa's best kept secrets and biggest national treasures. It is a national park, a world heritage site, a cultural icon for early civilization in the country, scenically diverse, florally enchanting, faunally abundant (particularly for birds) and its tourism infrastructure is exciting and inviting for all its visitors. It is located on the south bank of the Limpopo River at the meeting point of Botswana, South Africa and Zimbabwe and is about 5 hours drive north of Gauteng Province. Because the park is in 2 sections (eastern and western), to properly explore it a minimum of 4 nights is recommended - to spend at least 2 nights on each side. If one's time is less, it is best to concentrate on only one section.



From an accessibility perspective there are many outstanding attractions. There are accessible accommodation units in 2 rest camps; an accessible ablution in the park's campsite; an accessible tree-top boardwalk through the riverine trees of the Limpopo River; an accessible pathway to the confluence view-point overlooking 3 countries; a magnificent interpretive centre paying homage to one of South Africa's earliest human settlements plus a network of roads (some 4x4 only and others suitable for sedans) that allow wildlife and landscape viewing.



At the park's entrance the path to the reception is paved and ramped. There is plenty of open parking in a paved area so designated wheelchair bays are not necessary. Additionally the reception has a wheelchair friendly ablution, but this appears to only be provided in the gents' toilet!



Cottage 15 – Leokwe Camp

Leokwe Camp, the park's largest rest camp is in the eastern section of the park. Two of the camp's units are accessible for use by visitors with mobility impairment. See the accessibility profile on this camp for detailed photos and information on its facilities.

Limpopo Tented Camp is in the western section of the park and has one on its units accessible for use by visitors with mobility impairment. See the accessibility profile on this camp for detailed photos and information on its facilities. There is also an adapted accessible ablution facility at Mazhou Camp Site about 1km from Limpopo Tented Camp



Tent 3 – Limpopo Tented Camp

One of the park's highlights is the **treetop boardwalk** through the tall riverine trees that line the Limpopo River. This experience is fully accessible and it is wonderful to be up at tree level. Watching birds and other arboreal creatures is at a premium, but the forest floor beneath is also often host to mammals, such as bushbuck and sometimes even elephant. Depending on the water levels the Limpopo Riverbed can also produce plenty of wildlife. There are no ablutions at the hide, with the nearest one being 2km away at the confluence.



The Confluence is another of the park's "accessible" must-see attractions. A bricked pathway leads persons up the hill to a series of lookout decks that overlook the Limpopo River below and its tributary the Shashe River (which separates Botswana and Zimbabwe). It is a couple of hundred metres and while it is a steep journey the gradient is never too steep to prevent a strong person from propelling themselves. From the vantage point one can see 3 countries at once and scan for the wandering game and soaring birds of prey that can often be watched performing dramatic aerial acrobatics in the passing thermals.

On the other side of the parking area is an info centre, complete with ablutions (including a unisex accessible one) and small kiosk. There is also a boardwalk to another viewpoint looking south over the dramatic sandstone outcrops. However there are steps along this path up to the platform on top of a vantage point, so unless a wheelchair user is prepared to be carried, this feature is inaccessible.



The other accessible feature of the park is the Interpretive Centre near the park's main gate. This is due to be opened in September 2009 and will be well worth visiting. Towards the top of the facility some of the ramps are a little steep, but persevering to the higher elevations will allow views of the surrounding Limpopo Valley



The Interpretive Centre



Mapungubwe Hill

Some of the attractions of the park are not accessible to guests with mobility challenges. For one - Mapungubwe Hill and the guided tours that are held there are not accessible, due to the difficult terrain. The Vhembe Trails Camp is also not accessible, while Tshugulu Lodge has no accessibility adaptations, but a person in a wheelchair could stay there if they receive assistance up steps.

One of the special places in the park is Maloutswa Hide in the western section of the park. This is where game viewing in the park is at its best as there is a steady stream of game that come through to drink including elephant, several antelope, zebra, warthog, bushpig, leopard, baboon and monkey, while after heavy rains when the pan is in flood, the birdlife is outstanding and the place is like a mini Okavango Swamp. This hide is not fully accessible. The viewing slots in the hide are too high for comfortable wheelchair use and the path to the hide can have thorns, get muddy after heavy rain and has a latté bridge that requires crossing. Hopefully in the future the hide will be refurbished to make it more accessible, but even now in its partially accessible state, it is still well worth visiting

